

Crew Resource Management

Who Says Single-See Crew Coordination

Situational Awareness
Assertiveness
Decision Making
Leadership
Communication
Adaptability/Flexibility
Mission Analysis



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By Cdr. Kevin Bohnstedt and Lt. Kevin McLaughlin

We were two and a half months into our cruise. We had been in the Arabian Gulf for a month, and everyone was getting comfortable with the operations. I was scheduled for some tactical intercepts, specifically a night 2 v 2 AIC in one of the smaller air-training (AT) areas.

I was flying lead, along with Lt. McLaughlin (call sign Proton), who had just left a three-year tour at Topgun. With such an experienced section, we figured we had it wired. I went into detail on emergency procedures so we would be speaking the same language. Little did I know we would revisit this discussion later.

After the rendezvous, we began our first intercept. My first clue something was awry was halfway through the intercept. Our E-2 controller (King) asked if 302 had a problem. I ignored the question since I didn't hear a response. As the problem began to heat up, I noticed a light at my nine o'clock and stationary, which seemed to be in our AT. I thought the menacing red air forces were trying to swing my wingline.

I then heard King call, "Knock it off. Knock it off. Three zero two, do you have a problem?" I knew there was something wrong. No response from 302 meant he was either NORDO or having so many problems he couldn't respond. Either situation was bad.

I got a vector from King to 302, and I joined. On the goggles, I saw he had one engine at idle or off and the other in burner. I passed this to him over our control frequency and heard two mike clicks. I then asked if he was NORDO. Two more mike clicks. I told him I could hear his mike clicks and to give two for yes and one for no. I asked if he had a problem with his right engine (the one that appeared to be off). Two clicks. I asked if it was off. One click. Trying to narrow down the problem, I asked if it was oil pressure. Two clicks. The left motor actually was in military power but just appeared to be in burner because of the goggles.

I knew he needed to land ASAP. I noticed his hook was down, which was our signal to land immediately, but I asked anyway. He responded with two clicks.

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Coordinating with King and our section of red air FA-18s who stayed in the opposite corner of the area, we began our journey home. I stayed in wing and passed to Proton that I would relay his calls. Two clicks.

The other pilots in our section looked over NATOPS to back us up. King passed to the ship that we had an emergency and would require an immediate landing. We were the last event of the night, and the pull forward would not be required. As we headed back to the ship, the plan of relaying all calls worked like a charm. On first call, I let the ship know about our situation. The ship was in a turn and would be ready by the time we were behind them. After discussions with the rep in CATCC, we agreed I would fly wing, with the lead emergency aircraft coming in half flaps, using both engines for the pass. Proton, an experienced FA-18 driver and LSO, knew the implications of the approach and understood all aspects of the trap. I would separate at about a mile and fly high cover to make sure he made it aboard.

Now came the time to adjust fuel for recovery. While Proton dumped down to

landing weight, I held my dump. I didn't want a possibility of two low-state Hornets flying around. To put us both at about the same flying capabilities, I decided to go to full flaps when Proton went to half flaps.

Then my training failed me. Proton flashed his lights twice to let me know he was going dirty. I misinterpreted this to mean "take the lead," which seemed to be odd, but I was flying out in front. Once I figured out what was going on, I got back into position.

The rest of the flight went without a hitch. Paddles knew that Proton was NORDO, and could receive and would respond by clicking. "Call the ball" from Paddles was answered by two clicks, followed shortly by an OK 3-wire.

